

PEARL HARBOR DECEMBER 7, 1941 a PERSONAL EXPERIENCE of Ensign Irving J[Dave] Davenport USNA Class of 1940

I was stationed on the USS Oklahoma BB 37. At the time of the Japanese attack I was Officer of the Deck, having relieved LT[jg] Bill Ingram at 0745. The OOD responsibilities to be brief are those of representing the Commanding Officer and in charge of all persons on duty at the particular time.

However, I would like to begin with the activities on Tuesday, Dec. 2nd. The Oklahoma was scheduled to fire a night Battle practice. For this particular exercise the Secondary Battery was to provide starshell illumination for the Main Battery. That afternoon officers of the Gunnery Department, I was assigned to the Secondary Battery Division, assembled in the wardroom at the request of the Executive Officer, CDR J.L. Kenworthy. The purpose of the meeting was to inform us that the exercise was postponed, because the target towing vessel, a converted 4 stack Destroyer was ordered to join other destroyers in search of an unidentified submarine. The Oklahoma cleared the area and did conduct the exercise the next evening.

On Dec 6th the Oklahoma entered Pearl Harbor and moored alongside the USS Maryland. Those of us in the duty section remained on board made preparations for ADM Kidd's inspection of the ship which was to be held on Monday Dec 8th. These preparations included opening the blisters, dead air spaces below the water line, for cleaning, and removal of all firing pins and locks from guns for cleaning. All ready ammunition had been struck below.

This was the situation when I relieved Lt Ingram as Senior OOD. Soon thereafter I received a Catholic Church Party aboard. The Oklahoma's Chaplain was a Catholic Priest, LT{JG} Schmidt, who became a casualty. A ship was later named in his memory for heroic action. Preparations in connection with 0800 routine were being carried out. The Quartermaster of the watch sent aft to hoist the colors; the Boatswain's Mate was sent forward to strike 8 bells. I believe the ASS't OOD, Ens. Sherwin, was in the vicinity of the prow leading to the Maryland. The JOOD, Ens. Hunter, was at the forward gangway. A few minutes before 0800 the attack on the Oklahoma began by torpedo planes coming from the vicinity of the Officer's Club Landing. At that moment I was in the process of receiving another church party when I saw a plane launch a torpedo and when it raised its wings the emblem of the Rising Sun was visible. Immediately the launch was waived away, and was later observed rescuing men from the fuel oil on the surface which was beginning to burn. I shouted as loud as possible "Man your battle stations, This is an air raid. !!!" As I started toward the area where the General Alarm was located the first plane was overhead and I noticed bullets impinging in the teak deck. I don't know who actually operated the Alarm, or made the announcement on the PA system. Then I saw the Executive Officer and joined him.

After the first torpedo hit the ship began to shudder and list. With each succeeding hit the shaking became more pronounced and with increasing magnitude, similar to the beating of a kettle drum as at the crescendo of a symphony. Altogether there were 9 torpedo hits. After 8 or 9 minutes and from the reactive force of the explosions the ship turned through 150 degrees. Belly Up best describes the position. One wonders if this would have happened if the dead air spaces, the blisters, had been closed.

As the ship turned over I climbed around the ship's bottom with CDR Kenworthy, who had given the order to abandon earlier. After the ARIZONA, hit by dive bombers literally disintegrated, two berths astern, I jumped into the water between Oklahoma and Maryland and swam ashore to Ford Island. With uniform, shoes and oil on the surface swimming was difficult and while swimming to Ford Island I assisted CDR Rohow, the ship's Doctor, who had swallowed a large amount of oil. At Ford Island I joined other Oklahoma Survivors.

The crew of the Oklahoma was about 1150 Officers and Men, of these 429 were casualties. Most were trapped in compartments below. Some twenty men were trapped in the after steering compartment. The propeller shafts are located in this compartment. The men knocked on the hull and fortunately the sound was heard. Shipfitters from The shipyard cut through the hull and these men were rescued after some 40 hours. Later divers exploring the inside of the Oklahoma found a message on the bulkhead of a compartment dated Dec 23 just two days before Christmas.

My knowledge about other ships is limited. The Tennessee and West Virginia were astern of the Oklahoma and Maryland. The West Virginia sank in the shallow waters after being torpedoed and bombed. Over 500 men were casualties on that ship. The Captain of the West Virginia was killed by shrapnel from a bomb which exploded on the

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Tennessee. The battleship Pennsylvania was seriously damaged in drydock and the California also sank to the bottom. The Nevada got underway but later beached rather than sink in the narrow channel of Pearl Harbor. At 8:10 AM a 1710 lb bomb reportedly struck near turret no.2 of the Arizona and penetrated deep into the battleship's innards before exploding near the forward magazine. The Arizona blew up with a tremendous blast. Most of the men aboard were killed. The blast from the Arizona blew men off the decks of surrounding ships and threw tons of debris all over the harbor. Out of respect there will never be another ship of the US Navy that will have that name. Damage on the Maryland was minor from one bomb that struck the top deck. Eventually all battleships except Arizona and Oklahoma were repaired and modernized and fought in future battles.

I have mentioned only the battleships that were in Pearl Harbor on the 7th of Dec. There were 82 other ships. Many were destroyed or damaged with the loss of lives not to mention the many casualties at other military bases on Oahu. Fortunately carriers were not in Pearl Harbor that morning.

There were many heroes that day. On the Oklahoma Ensign Frank Flaherty held a flashlight in order for the men in the powder handling room of Turret No One to find their way to safety. He never made it. Posthumously he received The Congressional Medal of Honor.

Ten of my classmates were lost on the Arizona and three on the Oklahoma. They were all good friends of mine.

Many reports have been made about the attack. Gen Short and Adm Kimmel were severely reprimanded and retired, but subsequently were cleared of wrongdoing. It is certain that existing peace was in danger. Japanese codes had been broken indicating that the Japanese were up to no good. Adm Ingersoll accompanied Pres Roosevelt when meeting with Churchill off Newfoundland in 1940. Adm Ingersoll wrote of events at that meeting and states that Pres Roosevelt

promised Churchill that the US would become involved in the war, but the American people were not yet ready. The Pearl Harbor attack provided the American reason.

I have been asked if the Sept 11th attack is similar to that of Dec 7, 1941. My answer is only that of surprise. Sept 11th was very evil. It was against civilian interests and National Symbols. The Dec 7th attack was against military and naval targets. The personnel had taken an oath to defend our country and as such were in harm's way.

Today more than ever the motto of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association is: Remember Pearl Harbor - Keep America Alert is appropriate. Diligence is required. Not only Militarily, but Mentally and Morally.

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Dave was born June 22, 1918, in Pawnee, IL. He attended the local schools and graduated from High School in 1936. As a teenager he was a member of Boy Scout Troop 66 in Taylorville, IL and became an Eagle Scout in 1935. During the summer months he worked at the family farm, tending livestock, cultivating corn, etc.

He received an appointment to the US Naval Academy from the Honorable HH Mason and after acceptance was graduated from the Academy on June 6, 1940. He was commissioned an Ensign and was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, BB37. Was Officer of the Deck when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. Shortly after the ARIZONA disintegrated abandoned the OKLAHOMA with CDR Kenworthy, the Executive Officer.

Assignments during and after WWII were: USS FLETCHER, DD445, plankowner and initial Gunnery Officer; OPERATIONAL TRAINING COMMAND PACIFIC, Gunnery Training Instructor for new ships in shakedown training; USS PURDY DD734, plankowner and Executive Officer; and USS ENDICOTT, DMS 35 as Commanding Officer. During this period participated in 7 battle engagements, including Guadalcanal 3rd [Savo]; Tassafarango; Consolidation of Southern Solomons; the Class A sinking of a Japanese Submarine; Assault and Occupation of Okinawa and Minesweeping in the Kyushu-Korea Area.

Between WWII and Korean Actions was C. O. Naval Recruiting Station Indianapolis, Sept '47 thru May '50. He was then assigned to The USS ELDORADO, AGC 11, as Executive Officer. After 9 months recommissioned THE USS McNair, DD 679, as Commanding Officer.

Awards received during these Wars included; Commendation Ribbon and Medal with Combat V, awarded by ADM Halsey; Bronze Star Medal with Combat V awarded by Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, in the name of the President. In addition a Navy Unit Commendation in PURDY; Korean Presidential Unit Citation in ELDORADO.

Subsequent Duty Stations include: US NAVAL ACADEMY, Dept of Marine Engineering; Staff COMCARDIV 2 as Surface Operations and Special Weapons Officer; and Staff COMSERVPAC, Fleet Personal Plans and Special Services. After twenty years, of which fourteen were at sea, seven of them in Destroyers, He retired from the Naval Service on July 1, 1960 in the Rank of Commander.

Upon retirement returned to Illinois, built a home in Bloomington where employed in the corporate office of GENERAL TELEPHONE of ILLINOIS for 12 years in the capacity as General Commercial Engineer and Marketing Services Administrator, primarily responsible for introducing new products and services and associated charges.

After successful Cancer Surgery he received a Leave of Absence and left the Telephone Company to manage farmland in Pawnee and Woodside Township Sangamon County, and near Prentice in Morgan County. He didn't return to the Telephone Company, but became active in Real Estate Appraising and after attending INDIANA and SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITIES received credentials to become a member of the Appraisal Institute. Now retired from Appraising he continues farming activities.

Has been active in Boy Scout Adult Leadership Training; Past President of the Bloomington Rotary Club and a recipient of a Paul Harris Fellowship. He is a member of the PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS ASSOCIATION and Past President of the ILLINOIS PHSA Chapter 2. Has Life Memberships in THE US NAVAL ACADEMY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and The Retired Officers Association...

Married Dorothy Shaw of Pawnee on Jan 12, 1944. They are parents of Stephen Davenport, Orlando, FL, and Judith Lehmann of Bloomington, IL. They have two grandchildren and one Great Granddaughter.